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No 8

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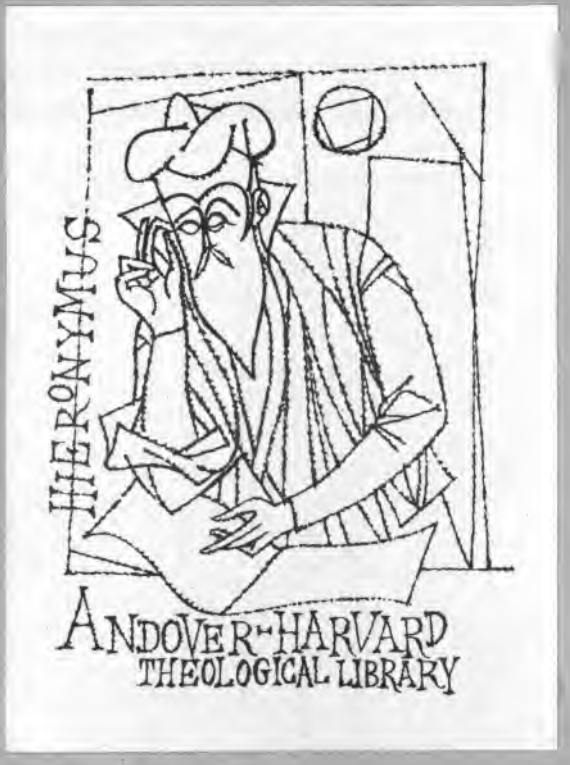
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No. VIII.

THE CHURCH.

BY

REV. HENRY W. RUGG, D.D.

I SPEAK IN REGARD OF CHRIST AND OF THE CHURCH.

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"We pray for Thy Holy Church universal, that it may be so guided and governed by Thy good Spirit, that all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth, and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace and in righteousness of life."

THE CHURCH.

INTRODUCTORY.

THE writer believes in the Divine appointment of the Church and its present efficiency of spiritual help and blessing. It is through the Church, as an instrumentality thus ordained, that the light and truth of Christianity are to be disseminated and the kingdom of Christ our Lord extended on the earth. The Church is a factor in the most important interests of society, and is vitally related to the world's progress. No other institution can take its place or do its work. It is the Body of Christ, of right demanding the allegiance and support of all who believe in him as the Son of God and seek to be spiritually united to him, the Head of the Church.

Out of love for the Church and a belief in both its sacredness and utility the following pages

have been written. This work is not a treatise on ecclesiology; it is only what its name suggests, a Manual that points in the way of Christian duty. The author trusts that it may stir some hearts with deeper love to Christ and move them to take their places in the one organization that best represents his truth and kingdom; and that it may have an influence upon others already in the Church to undertake a more devoted service in His Name, for the regeneration of human hearts and society. Then will the Church and kingdom of Christ be advanced and glorified.

I. — Antecedents of the Christian Church.

The essential idea of the Church is in man himself. He has a religious nature which is suggestive of such an institution, and he has associative tendencies of being that point in the same direction. A strong instinct prompts him to reach out after God, to build altars, to offer sacrifices, to engage in various forms of devotion not by or for himself alone, but in co-operation with others and for the common benefit. We should expect therefore an organization adapted

to the expression of man's religious and social nature. The Church of God presents itself as such an organization, and it may be said to have existed, constructively at least, from the beginning of the human world, — from the time that man became awakened to moral consciousness and was moved to engage in the practices of religion. In that earliest period the truth of God took an organic form, while fitting agencies were provided to enable men to cultivate the higher faculties of their being, and worship and work together. By such religious fellowship and service they were helped to attain a fulness of life which they could not have reached had they dwelt apart from each other in the maintenance of an intense individualism, or had religion been presented to man only as an abstraction.

Primarily then, we say, the Church was instituted to meet the needs of universal humanity. It was the natural outcome of the religious element in man, having behind it the social instinct and an appreciation of the need of co-operation in rendering offerings and services to the Great Creator. Or, to state the fact somewhat differently but none the less accurately, God provided

for the religious wants of His children by establishing an institution whose place was clearly disclosed in the scheme of the Divine economy and grace. Thus came the Patriarchal Church, identified at first with the family, and at a later period made an integral part of the national life of the Jewish people. The Church resting on a distinctive basis of religion found place in the household of Noah and in the Hebrew Commonwealth and kingdom. It existed in the early times associated with the family and the state, and if these last named institutions are to be regarded as divinely provided for human needs, so ought the Church likewise to be considered, no doubts being entertained as to its usefulness or its permanency.

In the order of natural progress the Church Patriarchal developed into the Hebraic Church, which, as already intimated, impressed itself powerfully upon the national life of God's ancient people. So it was, "The State gave form and strength to the Church, and the Church in turn penetrated, ruled, sanctified the State."[1] When spiritual declension came upon the Jewish people the Nation went down, but the Church

[1] Ecclesiology, E. D. Morris, D.D., p. 28.

survived. Indeed the Church always moved along an advancing way to the time when Jesus the Christ came upon earth. Says the author just quoted: "It was not in the Divine plan that the Church should die out with the Nation; rather was it planned that the Nation as a containing vessel should be broken into fragments, in order that the Church might strike out its roots into surrounding soil and grow into its predestined universality. . . . The theocratic era prepared the way for the royal, and this in turn prepared the way for the period during which the outer shell of faith fell off, and the essential principle of faith germinated into form and beauty, by way of preparation for the advent of a Saviour and a religion wherein the Patriarchal and the Hebraic Churches were to find their final and perfect realization." [1]

It is well to note these antecedents of the Christian Church, — the preparation made for its establishment. In such a review, however hasty, we can hardly fail to see a divine leading toward the better organization that was to come. The ancient institution was shadowy and imperfect, sadly lacking in the elements of an exalted

[1] Ecclesiology, p. 29.

spirituality; yet it represented much of the truth of God and the power of God attested by the faith and piety of human souls heartily allegiant to Jehovah. It was modified and expanded during the centuries, always maintaining, however, the vital principles entering into its constitution, and so was carried over to the new dispensation where it was merged in the broader and more spiritual organism representing Christ and His truth. According to a suggestive figure employed by Saint Paul the Christian Church was grafted upon the Jewish tree.[1] Thus were devout anticipations realized, prophetic announcements fulfilled, as the perfected Church under the Gospel appeared to represent the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ and make that Kingdom more effective among men.

II. — Meaning and Uses of the term "Church."

The word "Church," as employed in common speech, is variously applied. Its etymological meaning does not govern all its uses. Confusion sometimes arises from the different senses in which we employ this term of such large

[1] Romans xi. 17–24.

significance. Thus Church and denomination are often treated as synonyms, while in a more restricted line of application a parish is regarded as the equivalent of a church. A house or place of worship is called a church, and a congregation of people assembled therein for worship is designated by the same term. Applied, as it is more properly, to believers in and followers of Jesus Christ, the word may still have a very broad or a very narrow scope of meaning. Under the common classification, there is an "invisible Church" and a "visible Church;" and the last named body is divided into the "Church Militant" and the "Church Triumphant," — the members of the former being Christ's acknowledged followers on the earth, while the latter phrase points to a communion of saints in Heaven.

It is important to keep in mind these different uses of the word, thus avoiding confusion so far as possible. It is equally important, where references are made to the Church in its purely spiritual aspects, that there should be a clear understanding of the fact that the term is there applied to a formless and unorganized force. It represents in such a use

an intangible relation of souls to each other, and of Christ with them. It may be allowable to speak of a church thus spiritualized and with no outward sign of membership or bond of union. If so, the Church under that largest and most comprehensive definition includes all Christians. Thus remarks Baxter: "If thou hast faith and love and the Spirit, thou art a Christian; and if a Christian, a member of Christ's Church Universal." This affirmation is supposed to be in consonance with the words of our Saviour: "For whosoever shall do the will of My Father who is in Heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother." [1]

Oftener than otherwise, however, and in accordance with the most significant use of the term, we speak of the Church as an organization. It is an institution having well-defined features that fix attention. As Neander says, "It is the kingdom and royal dwelling-place of Christ on the earth." It was divinely appointed to represent Christ and His truth among men. By its agency the Christ law and the Christ power are made effective in ways and to an extent not possible if Christianity

[1] Matt. xii. 50.

found expression only as individual thought, belief, and experience. The Church constitutes an agency for associated efforts in behalf of Christian truth and righteousness. It includes a membership professedly allegiant to Christ, united by a common faith, and pledged to work together in His name. It is in this sense the Christian Church presents itself with sanctions that are most solemn and claims that are most urgent.

It cannot be said that all this of lofty import and purpose is signified by the New Testament term translated Church. The Greek word *ekklesia* means literally an "assembly" or "congregation," — a number of persons called and associated together for Christian worship and service. The word is seldom used in the Gospels, though it appears frequently in other parts of the New Testament, being applied with more or less breadth of specification to Christian believers and worshippers. One of the most notable uses of the word is the declaration made by our Lord, "Upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."[1]

[1] Matt. xvi. 18.

Whether or not the reference in this affirmation is to Peter, whose name signified a *stone* or *rock*, or to the confession that the Apostle had just made acknowledging the Divine Authority of Christ, there is no warrant in the statement for that supremacy which has been claimed for Peter in the establishment of the Christian Church. He was justly prominent in placing its foundations and directing its earliest course; but the other Apostles shared with him such power and responsibility. Thus it is said the Church is "built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone." [1] Peter himself acknowledged this true foundation, for he says of Christ the Lord: He is "a living stone, rejected indeed of men, but with God elect," [2] being the fulfilment of the ancient prophecy quoted by the Apostle in the same connection, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone." [3] The permanency of the Christian Church, no less than its true character, is indicated by all these statements. It is established on one enduring foundation.

Whatever different meanings may be given

[1] Eph. ii. 20. [2] 1 Peter ii. 4. [3] Isa. xxviii. 16.

to the word in the uses to which it is put by the New Testament writers, there can be no question of the fact that the Church was understood to include the acknowledged disciples of Christ, and to represent the organic life of Christianity. "The Church in its original sense," says Dr. Howard Crosby, "as denoted by the Greek word *ekklesia*, is the congregation of believers in orderly form."[1] It was an organization. It had standards of belief, together with laws and methods of associated activity. Thus it presented itself as the sign, growth, the expression of Christian truth designed to have prevailing power among men.

In the New Testament usage there are three distinct meanings attached to the word "Church." It designates individual companies of believers assembled in one place for worship and communion, the place being often a private residence. Thus Saint Paul sends his greeting to "brethren that are in Laodicea, and to Nymphas, and the Church that is in his house;"[2] also to Archippus, "and to the Church in thy house."[3] Evidently the Chris-

[1] Hom. Review, May, 1890. [2] Col. iv. 15.
[3] Philemon, i. 2.

tians in a private family, with probably a few of their friends and neighbors, constituted a church in one of the meanings belonging to the word. The term is also frequently applied to united bodies of Christian believers in a certain jurisdiction or country. So it is that the Churches of Galatia or of Asia are specified.[1] These groups of believers could hardly have been united by any close bond of ecclesiastical rule; there was no "National Church" in the Apostolic period. In the nature of things there could not have been. The plural form of the word is generally employed in the Epistles, where reference is made to the Christians of any given country; and hence we read of the Churches of Asia, the Churches of Galatia, etc.

There is, however, another and more important usage of the word by the writers of the New Testament, who frequently apply the term to the whole body of disciples. The "visible Catholic Church" evidently was often in the thought of the Apostles, and therefore they laid special emphasis upon a communion of Christians far transcending the local organization. They set the whole Church above particular

[1] 1 Cor. xvi. 1-19.

Churches, and called attention to it as representing the body of Christ, as including all who acknowledged Christ and were united to help advance his kingdom. Numerous uses of the word in this highest meaning might be cited. "The Lord added to the Church daily those who were being saved." [1] "As Christ also loved the Church." [2] "The Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." [3] In this highest sense the Church is significantly named the body of Christ, and is represented as our Lord's visible kingdom established on the earth. It is the organic life of Christianity, — a blessed, permanent force in the world's enlightenment and salvation.

III. — The Church in the Apostolic Period.

The founder of Christianity is likewise the founder of the Church that bears his name. In the Gospel economy, under the conditions of the new dispensation, the place for the Church was made clearly apparent and its establishment indicated. As already observed, there was

[1] Acts ii. 47. [2] Eph. v. 25.
[3] 1 Timothy, iii. 15.

brought over from the old dispensation a rich material of religious accumulation which had much to do with the shaping of institutional Christianity. And so there were laws and practices, rites and ceremonies, belonging to the Patriarchal and Hebraic Churches, which were carried over into the more spiritual organization of which Christ is declared to be the Head. In a very real and important sense, our Lord may be said to have instituted the Christian Church, but it did not take form and become a working body until after His resurrection and ascension. Prospectively it was indeed established by the teaching of principles and truths which underlie Christianity, as something also of its ceremonial was indicated by the endorsement which our Saviour gave to the rite of baptism, and by His institution of the Holy Supper. In its defined proportions, however, as an organization of specific aims and purposes, representing the redemptive work of the Saviour on earth, calling believers to its communion for the observance of sacred rites and the practice of religious duties, the Church of Christ cannot be said to have existed at so early a period.

The historical date of the establishment of

the Christian Church is that day of Pentecost when the Apostles "were all filled with the Holy Spirit"[1] and entered actively upon their great work of evangelization. It was the Holy Spirit that fitted the Apostles to be embassadors and witnesses of Christ in all parts of the world; and it was the Holy Spirit which instructed them in the exercise of the ecclesiastical authority vested in them. They realized on the day of Pentecost the full force of their commission: "Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."[2] They acted accordingly. They made actual and visible the Christian Church which had before been prospective, albeit its principles and spiritual character had been clearly outlined.

It is both interesting and instructive to study the Church — the Churches — of Apostolic times. The primitive Church was under the control and guidance of the Apostles, whose authority was derived directly from Christ Himself. In this respect their relation to the Church which took form in their hands was unlike the relation held by any of their successors; hence it becomes all

[1] Acts ii. 4. [2] Matt. xxviii. 19.

the more important to note what the Apostles commanded, practised, allowed, in the moulding and direction of the institution thus established. So likewise we may well turn our attention to the Christian Church as it existed in that first period, that we may see how simple and yet how efficient for the purposes intended were its essential features. It succeeded to and in some sense was a development of the Jewish Church. There was a wonderful change, however, between the old and the new institutions, for the Church in Apostolic times had no such elaborateness of ritual or number of rules and dogmas as had characterized the expression of religion under the Jewish dispensation. The creed of the early Church was exceeding brief, and the ecclesiastical polity was simplicity itself. Rules of procedure were somewhat elastic and variable, and but few tests were enjoined or ceremonial observances imposed.

The primitive Church, however, was an institution having metes and bounds and prescribed laws and usages, and a well-defined order of government. The Apostles were rulers and directors of the whole Church regarded as a unit. Their superintendence was personal, or exer-

cised through duly appointed agents. Saint Paul claimed to have "the care of all the Churches;"[1] Peter and John visited Samaria, where Philip had preached successfully and baptized many, and exercised there an authority which the subordinate Christian teacher did not claim to possess or attempt to wield.[2] Evidently there was an Apostolic superintendence of the whole Church, and this authority was delegated specifically on certain occasions. Thus Saint Paul writes to Titus: "I left thee in Crete that thou shouldst set in order the things that were wanting, and appoint Elders in every city as I gave thee charge."[3]

If we turn from this general government of the Church at large, vested in the hands of the Apostles, to the particular rule of local Churches, we shall find an orderly management and systematic course of procedure, albeit there were great differences in the administration of the Churches that sprung up rapidly as a result of the missionary labors of the Apostles. Those Churches were composed of men and women who believed in Christ and confessed Him,— they and their households. They were organ-

[1] 2 Cor. xi 28. [2] Acts viii. 14. [3] Titus i. 5.

ized on a simple but firm basis, meeting together for worship, for prayer and praise, for the observance of the Lord's Supper, for Christian culture and service. To lead and care for these organized assemblies there were certain officers required of higher and lower grades, and these seem to have been provided according to special exigencies or the differing needs disclosed. A wise law of expediency was recognized in that first period of the Christian Church, so allowing for a considerable variation in externals. Nevertheless there were ordained "ministers," "elders," "bishops," "presbyters," "deacons," in those early days, and to men thus commissioned was committed the oversight of these Churches. Thus leaders and teachers were not all possessed of the same gifts, and they exercised quite different faculties. "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the body of Christ."[1] To direct the affairs of the Church, preach the word, administer the Christian ordinances, and care for the poor and distressed, was then as now, the

[1] Eph. iv. 11, 12.

work to which ministers were called — "elders" or "bishops" — the end being "the edifying of the body of Christ." There was no papal establishment then; no hierarchy with a perversion and abuse of priestly orders; the bishop was often no more than the teacher of a simple congregation, the pastor of one body of believers, or the senior among a number of presbyters whose counsel was taken in the regulation of the affairs of any number of associated Churches. There was ecclesiasticism under that first rule, for due regard was paid to order, system, and authority; but it was a home government, wholesome, intelligent, simple, having but few of the cumbrous, hierarchical features which not many centuries afterwards pressed so heavily upon the whole Church and overlaid its spiritual life.

The Christian Church was by no means perfect in that first age of its history. The record shows its weaknesses and defects. It suffered even in that early period from apostasy, hypocrisy, and a corrupting selfishness on the part of many of its representatives. It did not appear in all respects as the ideal Church, "holy and without blemish," [1] for gross errors crept in, and its

[1] Eph. v. 27.

glory was dimmed by practices of folly, pride, and worldliness. Nevertheless the picture of the Church in Apostolic times is beautiful and attractive. Then it represented the simplicity of the Gospel in doctrine and forms, and not less the large and hopeful expression of Christianity which constitutes the world's highest inspiration. Its members, taken collectively, believed heartily, worked and worshipped in a close fellowship, thus broadening and deepening their own spiritual life while they sought to make the Church, which stood to them for the Christ faith and service, an aggressive, triumphant force in the world. It helps us in the study of applied Christianity to send our thought backward to the early Church and notice its faithful use of means and activities in honoring our Lord and extending His Kingdom on the earth.

IV. — Place and Functions of the Christian Church.

The Church announced by Christ and established by the Apostles, acting under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has lived and flourished

until now. It has embodied and expressed more or less clearly the vital truths of Christianity, and has been the vehicle of their communication among men. It has stood forth as a sign and memorial of the living Saviour, an organic witness of the Divine might and glory, and an effective agency of discipling the nations of earth according to the Christ command. And thus have been met in some degree those deep, spiritual needs of human nature, where first we find the suggestion of such an organization as the Christian Church. It presents itself thus naturally, and so has permanency. It justifies its continued existence on the ground of fitness for man's religious needs, and usefulness as a working force of truth and righteousness. "If religion had not some external institution, it would not have a manifestation among men as a distinct, substantive, all-important thing, — it would appear like a matter of private opinion, — its nature and evidence could scarcely be made sensible, still less prominent, to the eyes of mankind at large; and the grand benefits to be derived from social instruction and worship would be lost." [1] Constituted in accord with instincts

[1] J. Pye Smith, Christian Theology, p. 616.

and ideas that are fundamental in human nature, the Church, bearing God's impress upon it, might be expected to have an enduring life. This has been its history. The Christian Church has been touched by many changes, has passed through periods of great trial, has been subjected to many untoward influences both from within and from without; but it has survived all opposition, and has emerged from any temporary darkness with such a re-adjustment of its forces as to again attract the world to itself. It is not possible in this writing to trace the progress of events and changes as connected with the organic life of Christianity. Some things in such a review are not pleasant; many things are perplexing and tend to controversy; and it may well suffice for our present purposes that we consider how the Christian Church has stood enduringly and made progress, despite the grievous weights it has sometimes carried, and the base alloy which has been mixed with the pure material, both as regards its doctrines and its usages.

This advancing, re-adjusted Church is not a perfect institution. It has suffered by schisms and contests respecting questions of dogmatic belief or matters pertaining to forms and cere-

monies; it shows the scars of many a fierce conflict thus brought about. Divisions many and great exist within its lines, so that there is not everywhere one and the same representation of the Divine glory, worship, and testimony. Organic unity, the dream of pious hearts through all the centuries, still seems a great way off, for the clash of opposing systems and the strife of sects still continue. Spiritual unity, however, appears to be gaining ground. Externals, the merely technical matters relating to Church procedure, do not claim so much attention as formerly, nor is there so much stress laid upon the comparatively unimportant features of Christ's teaching. Never before, since the Apostolic age, was there so much of love and co-operation among Christians as now; the spirit of intolerance and bigotry seems fast disappearing, and believers and Churches are finding out the fact that the tests by which they must be tried are those of character and Christian productiveness. Sectarian bitterness does not make itself so much felt in these later days; there is more of love and sympathy among Christ's professed followers, and thus the spiritual entity of the Church becomes more evident. Men who stand together,

sharing in the great activities of the age for human good and practically supporting each other in efforts to enlighten and bless the world, do not find it difficult to believe in that unity indicated by the Saviour in His memorable prayer for all His true followers: "I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one."[1]

The Christian Church, fragmentary as it seems at the first view, presents itself with oneness of character, aims, service, for its glory shines brightest only where it is regarded as an agency through which and by which the world shall be brought to Christ; all believers, all hearts being united to Him, the Great Head of the Church, by the blessed ties of faith, love, and true service.

Here then we discern the place and functions of the Christian Church, instituted to meet the religious needs of mankind, to preserve and diffuse the principles of the Gospel, and help faithful, believing souls to realize more of moral life and blessedness. Its adaptation to the busy, struggling world of to-day is clearly apparent. It claims the foremost place among the institutions and forces that exercise a benign influence

[1] John xvii. 23.

upon modern society. This claim rests not only upon the Divine appointment and sanction, but upon its inherent character, its representation of the Christ life and law, and its identification with the great redemptive forces of human salvation. In the progress of the centuries, subjected as the Christian Church has been to the influence of social and political changes, with new light breaking forth from the Scriptures and higher calls of duty and privilege continually presented, we may well believe that the scope of its work and the range of its mission have not lessened. Its essential features remain the same, but its province is broadened a good deal in these latest days under the estimate that is now applied to the institution.

The Church of Christ still exercises a spiritual ministry to the individual. One of its functions, as a repository of moral forces, is to influence persons and bring them one by one into closer relations with God. As an agency of Christian enlightenment, a help to holy living, and a means of grace and blessing, it ministers efficiently to man's religious needs. By the personal confession of Christ and pledge of fidelity to Him which it requires, by the

ordinances and fellowship which it provides, together with the special duties for which it gives the call and makes the opportunity, the Church exercises a gracious and powerful ministry to mankind as individuals. It is an instrumentality through which man's religious life is renewed and developed as the pledged follower of Christ makes progress in the heavenly way.

Far beyond this line, however, do the offices and functions of the Christian Church extend. The Church is designed to act within and upon society. It is in the realms of associated endeavor that its mighty force is disclosed and its grand accomplishments signified. The power that it inherently possesses with all its accumulated resources is to be applied objectively to serve the interests of related life. The Christian Church which meets the loftiest ideal must show a broad sympathy with human needs, and be practically helpful to men in all their struggles to attain more favored conditions. It can only justify its existence by doing work outside its own lines, and constantly making itself felt as an aggressive force in the regeneration of human society and the conquest of the whole world to Christ. In such true service, repre-

senting the religion of the New Testament applied to the social, educational, and industrial life of the community, — to all its interests and concerns of moral uplifting, — we may well discern the place and functions of the Christian Church in our own most favored age. Occupying such an exalted position, called to such extended and practical labors, the Church suffers no abridgment of its ancient prestige, and is not less potent in fulfilling other ministries and discharging other offices having relation to personal faith and piety. Its kingdom is not lessened by the view taken, and all the more glorious does it appear in the broad sweep of its activities leading to universal righteousness.

V. — Ordinances of the Church.

As the Church is not Christianity itself, so the ordinances accepted and used by the Church do not constitute its entire vitality. Back of the institution which expresses the Christ being and rule is Divine truth, existing primarily in ideas and principles, and back of all rites is the organism that adopts them. But just as we should expect Christianity to

appear in an organic life and take on an institutional character, so should we anticipate that certain rites would be appointed and made important in the administration of the body thus created. It does not seem strange that there should be ordinances of a sacred and binding character divinely imposed upon the Church, identified in the very nature of things with its communion and work; and most certainly there is nothing more arbitrary or unnatural in these rites and observances than in the establishment of the Church itself.

There are two ordinances or sacraments generally recognized in the Christian Church; namely, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. There are other ordinances regarded as sacraments in some communions. Thus the Church of Rome includes seven ordinances in the list of sacraments, — Baptism, Lord's Supper, Confirmation, Penance, Ordination, Marriage, and Extreme Unction. However important some of these ordinances or usages may be, they do not rank with the first two named rites, nor are they presented in the Scriptures as of like binding import. Setting aside the so-called sacraments, which were added by the Church in the

days when vain tradition and superstition held sway, we have to consider the two chief ordinances whose use seems justified by the letter and the spirit of the New Testament.

It is to be borne in mind that the term "sacrament" is not a Scriptural word, having been adopted into ecclesiastical usage after the Apostolic period. The word is significant, however, as applied to observances, by the use of which believers are supposed to solemnly pledge themselves to Christ and His service. Baptism and the Lord's Supper, regarded as sacraments, imply much of sacred obligation and true spiritual allegiance to Christ the Lord. They are signs and evidences of a right disposition of the life; and they likewise represent great and precious truths of the Gospel, and the spiritual presence of Christ our Lord.

Baptism is the initiatory rite of the Christian Church. It was adopted as such by the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, and has been thus regarded and practised since that memorable date. Jesus was himself baptized at the hands of John the Baptist,[1] thus sanctioning the use of the rite; though for Him, the head of the

[1] Matt. iii. 13, 17.

Church, it was not needed either as a sign or a pledge. During the personal ministry that Jesus exercised on the earth, baptism was recognized as a sacred rite, and was practised by His disciples to some extent. So it is recorded "that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John; though Jesus himself baptized not, but His disciples."[1] Evidently there was some regard paid to this rite, as introductory to open Christian discipleship, prior to the period when the risen Saviour gave command for its perpetual observance.[2] The baptismal rite administered during the personal ministry of Jesus did not take on the significance with which it was invested after the ascension of our Lord. As the visible Church was not actually constituted until the Holy Ghost came upon the Apostles, so not until then can it be said that Christian baptism was directly enjoined and presented in all its fulness of meaning. Saint Peter, in his memorable discourse on the day of Pentecost, laid stress upon this initiatory rite. His call was, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you;"[3] and most successful was his appeal, for "they that gladly heard his

[1] John iv. 1, 2. [2] Matt. xxviii. 19. [3] Acts ii. 38.

word were baptized, and that same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." [1]

From that date forward the Apostles preached the word, established churches, and baptized believers according to the commission they had received from Christ. Just what the order of service was, and the precise words used, and the specific manner in which water was applied to the candidate, are matters left in some obscurity; but the fact that baptism was required and administered by the Apostles admits of no question. The instances of the Apostolic practice of this rite are numerous, and the incidental references to its sacred and obligatory character are still more ample. There is no room to doubt the position assigned to this rite by the early Church, any more than there is to question the significance which attached to it as a sign of death unto sin and birth into righteousness. How aptly Saint Paul states the spiritual import of baptism: "How shall we, who died to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into His death? That like as Christ was

[1] Acts ii. 41.

raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."[1]

Baptism specially signified moral regeneration, actual as in the cases of believers, prospective as in the instances where children were the subjects of the rite. To both classes, however, it indicated a reception into the Church. Thus this ordinance was applied in all its beautiful force and significance. Old and young were baptized, families and households, and to one and all a Church relationship was pledged or typified.

The Lord's Supper comes to us with no less solemn sanctions, while it is invested with sweeter associations and still more gracious suggestions. The Scriptural accounts show the purpose of Christ in instituting the rite, and His evident design that it should continue to be used by all His followers as an act of commemoration and a means of grace. Three of the Evangelists record with much carefulness the institution of this ordinance; they report the tender and solemn manner in which Jesus brought into use symbols most significant, that He might represent and confirm the essential characteristics of the religion He taught, and impress upon the minds

[1] Romans vi. 2.

of His disciples the offering He was about to make of Himself for the salvation of the world. One of the accounts given is as follows: "And as they were eating, He took bread, and when He had blessed, He brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take ye: this is my body. And He took the cup, and when he had given thanks, He gave to them: and they all drank of it. And He said unto them, This is my blood of the covenant, which is shed for many. Verily I say unto you, I will no more drink of the fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." [1]

The force and meaning of the symbols thus employed will be apprehended if we consider other passages of the Gospel. Thus our Saviour asserts: "This is the bread which cometh down out of Heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die. I am the living bread which came down out of Heaven: if any man eat of this bread he shall live forever: yea and the bread which I will give is my flesh for the life of the world. Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life." [2] St. Paul was moved to indicate in very clear words the way and manner

[1] Mark xiv. 22, 25. [2] John vi. 50, 51, 54.

in which Jesus instituted this sacred rite. "For I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, how that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed took bread; and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, This is my body which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of me. In like manner also the cup, after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood; this do, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come."[1]

The symbolical character of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion is most evident. It was instituted under conditions of pathetic solemnity just before the scenes of Gethsemane and Calvary. It was given first to Jewish disciples, who would naturally be quick to discern the relation of this new rite with the Passover, and hence appreciate its imputation and binding use. It was accepted by believers generally in the early Church, as is evident from frequent allusions in Acts and the Epistles. It appealed powerfully in its commemorative features to both Jewish and Gentile Christians. At the first it was an ob-

[1] 1 Cor. xi. 23, 25, 26.

servance somewhat less formal and solemn than now, being made the closing part of a social meal and used very frequently. As thus applied in connection with an actual supper it suffered some abuses, and was therefore separated from the "Feast of Charity," with which it had been first joined. The Sacramental celebration seems always to have been regarded as a religious ceremony, though in its earlier use it had more of a social and festive character than afterwards. It was solemnly enjoined upon the churches, and became a distinctive sign of the body and brotherhood of Christ. It was understood to be a symbolical representation of Christian truth, of the life and death of the head of the Church, a memorial rite, an instituted means of grace to all who should observe it in a right frame of mind and heart.

Thus this holy rite was perpetuated and its use continued under varying forms in the Christian Church. Its universal and perpetual obligation has seldom been questioned, albeit much controversy has arisen as to the modes of its administration and the effects produced by its observance. Even in our time wide differences of opinion prevail respecting these points. We

do not propose to enter into a discussion of these differences, but only express our thought that the best way of determining such questions is to ascertain the view which our Lord and his Apostles took of the Holy Communion, at the same time keeping in mind the spiritual character of the Christian religion. Thus regarding the ordinance we shall certainly be drawn toward it with sacred and true regard. We shall see that its use is justified, made obligatory indeed, by the time and manner of its appointment; that just as the Hebrews appreciated the binding import of the Passover, so should Christians give heed to the mandate: "Do this in remembrance of me." In such a view, with an estimate fixed according to Scriptural presentation of the subject, we shall have respect and reverence for this sacred rite as a perpetual testimony of Christ and His truth.

It does not matter that gross errors and corruptions have been associated with the Lord's Supper, that the phrases "eating the flesh" and "drinking the blood" of Christ have been pressed to an unwarranted meaning, — and the declaration "This is My Body" taken to mean the actual presence of Christ corporally in the

symbols used, — all this matters little as affecting the Scriptural view of the rite and its claim to continual observance. We have only to regard the rite as Christ instituted it, interpret and apply it in its true moral significance, and it still appears in all its holy import and sweet attractiveness, an agency divinely established to open the way of communion between disciples of Christ, one with another and all with the Saviour, an abiding sign and pledge of fealty to the Master on the part of all those who participate in a service of such holy import. So it is justified and blessed in the truth it suggests; the fellowship which it provides for and quickens; the remembrance it incites of the Matchless One who bound Himself down on Calvary and suffered for us all, and the renewed pledge which is implied in the use of the emblems, — a pledge of faith, love, and all true service from hearts fed and nourished by the Spiritual Christ.

VI. — Prerequisites for Church Membership.

If it be granted that the Christian Church has a rightful place in the world of to-day, and may properly claim the support of faithful souls,

it becomes important to consider the terms on which such devotion shall be signified, and the tests of fitness to admission within its line. Who ought to constitute the Church of Christ on the earth? What ought to be required of candidates in the way of preparation for membership in the Christian Church?

Going back to the Church as it existed in the time of the Apostles, we find the basis of membership to have comprised these two essential features; repentance of sins, and faith in Christ as the Saviour of men. The message of Peter at the Pentecost was direct and simple to this effect. He said, "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of sins."[1] Those who received the Apostle's word were baptized and accepted into the newly formed Church, in which organization they gave proof of the discipleship to Christ by words and works of pious devotion, and by maintaining a fellowship which in that early period was most cordial and hearty among believers. Some measure of faith was required; there was a call for belief in Christ, but not to an acceptance of any cumbrous and perplexing

[1] Acts ii. 38.

definitions pertaining to His being and truth; and there was a demand for the open profession of a determination to lead a righteous life and be obedient to the Gospel precepts. A penitent and devout spirit, an honest acceptance of Jesus Christ as Master and Leader, with some degree of moral purpose and firm disposition, constituted all that the primitive Church required of men and women received into its communion.

Perhaps the tests and standards were not at the first sufficiently stringent. We know that much more was required of candidates as the Church grew strong and extended both its limits and its authority. In some periods of its history it has imposed many and harsh tests, fencing up the way, as it were, to church membership, by requirements relating to faith, knowledge, and experience, such as were entirely unknown in the Apostolic age. Sometimes undue stress has been laid upon the acceptance of certain doctrines of religion included in the standards of belief; again it has been deemed of the utmost importance to ascertain whether a "change of heart" had been experienced on the part of the applicant, or sufficient progress made in apply-

ing Christian truth to the conduct of life, to warrant admission into the Church, which has been too much regarded in the past as a sacred enclosure, a place of repose, for the saints. It is not needful to spend much time in deciding whether a candidate has been really converted and has passed through a well-defined Christian experience, and in considering how well versed he is in dogmatic theology; still there are qualifications which must be insisted upon; prerequisites that ought not to be ignored or lightly set aside. These include a hearty repentance and an actual forsaking of sins; an earnest purpose to bring the character and the life into accord with the standard of Gospel requirements; a self-surrender to Christ, concerning whom of course there must be some measure of belief together with some understanding of the truth he proclaimed to the world. These seem to be essential prerequisites, and they cover the entire ground of requirements included in the practice of the ancient Church. It ill accords with the Catholicity of an institution bearing the Christ name, and representing His kingdom on the earth, to bar the approach to its communion by sundry dogmatic tests imposed, or

requirements calling for great intellectual or spiritual culture.

A particular Church may perhaps insist upon special tests for membership in its communion, justifying itself in so doing on the ground that there must be a substantial agreement among those who are to walk and work together. Just how far it should go in setting up denominational prerequisites to entrance into its household is an open question. If we turn the subject round, however, and regard it from the individual standpoint, there would seem to be little or no trouble in its determination. If one is thinking of joining a Universalist Church he will naturally ask, "Shall I be at home there?" Unless he can accept in substance what is distinctive in the Universalist interpretation of Christianity, he cannot properly unite with that body; he had better affiliate with some other branch of the Church. And of course there should be a like questioning and decision on the part of all earnest men and women proposing to unite with one or another body of believers, that they may take no false steps, but go where their convictions naturally carry them, and where they feel they can render the most of service to God and man.

The Church in its various communions presents itself to command the faith, devotion, and service of all the followers of Christ. If there is the right purpose, an awakened sense of duty, a feeling of self-surrender to Christ, possessing the hearts of God's children, then indeed are the indispensable prerequisites of Church membership met; but something more is needed to mark an entrance into Church relations and signify what is really meant by such a connection. There must be an open assumption of obligations and duties, and a conformity to certain outward observances identified with the very life of the Church forms and usages, that cannot be ignored without greatly limiting its dignity and truth.

Confession is called for at the outset. Jesus desires His disciples to acknowledge Him: "Whosoever will confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father who is in Heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in Heaven."[1] Saint Paul emphasized the Christ call for confession: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and

[1] Matt. x. 32, 33.

shalt believe in thine heart that God has raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved; for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."[1] Christ requires an acknowledgment from his disciples, — a confession of faith and a profession of fealty. The Church which represents His kingdom on the earth rightfully demands that some sign shall be given by those enrolled as its members, so that they may be known and counted as loyal to the great Commander.

A profession is to be made and witnessed; not an assertion of saintly character, profound knowledge, or eminent services, but only an affirmation of faith and love toward the Great Head of the Church, Christ the Lord. The vows taken, the obligations assumed, the acknowledgments made and signified by use of the ordinances, should be understood to indicate no assumed superiority, but only a pledge of personal endeavor to make the character and the life conform to the Christian standard, and to unite with others under the same vows of consecration in helpful fellowship and works

[1] Romans x. 9, 10.

of good. Entrance into the Church should imply this much of purpose, being understood to follow and indicate changes of thought, feeling, and conduct, and to mark the binding of the life to high and holy aims.

Any branch of the Church, to maintain its place as attached to the true vine and justify its right to be, must stand out separate from the world. It must assert its religious significance and make the compact of members with itself to mean something. If it shall seek to increase its membership by taking a lower position, reducing its claims, and requiring little or nothing of formal confession or pledge on the part of those coming within its lines, the question may well be raised whether, if thus successful in augmenting its members, the gain is not merely nominal. A church organization is not much strengthened by adding to itself careless, irresponsive, or undevout members who attach but little meaning to the institution, and consent, perhaps, to have their names upon the church books, regarding the establishment of such a connection as a matter of slight consequence. Better by far is it to maintain the Church in its distinctive attitude, and to re-

quire something of preparation and testimony on the part of those who enter its active communion. They who come into the Church having the prerequisites indicated, recognizing the importance of the step they are taking in confessing Christ and pledging themselves to service in His name, will most certainly exercise large influence and be extensively useful in and through its communion; they will be greatly blessed while blessing others in the Church relations.

VII. — Objections urged against the Church and the Ordinances.

It must be admitted that a goodly number of intelligent people, some of them religiously inclined, look with disfavor upon the Church and its Ordinances. One class of opposers would abolish the Church with all that goes with it of ceremonial usage. Another class would be contented with such a readjustment as should bring this institution to the level of societies claiming no Divine appointment or sanctions, when of course the organization would no longer be a Church according to the

New Testament standard, and its ordinances would be little respected or used. Still another class urge objections which apply only to certain features of Church life and government, and may therefore be regarded as suggestive of an amended course of ecclesiastical procedure and not of the destruction of the institution.

It is boldly affirmed by representatives of the first-named class that the whole Church organization has become a clog upon men. It has outlived its usefulness, we are told. The present age does not require such an institution. Its rites have become meaningless and distasteful to the more intelligent portions of the community. What the world wants to-day is applied Christianity set free from institutional forms and ceremonies. Of course we challenge the correctness of these affirmations. The utility of the Church organization is still clearly evident. It has not ceased to be required as a working force of moral and spiritual power on the earth. The best instincts of human hearts are still operating for its support. The world's progress, changes in social and moral order, the practicalizing of Chris-

tian truth, do not by any means detract from the claims of the Church to be considered a permanent institution. Its solemn, significant rites are still needed; devout and loving hearts still appreciate their worth.

It is often said that the Church of to-day — in Protestant jurisdictions — has lost prestige and influence by its changed attitude respecting authority and church membership. Formerly a special sanctity was supposed to attach to the institution, and its members did not hesitate to claim that they were the special favorites of God and Christ. Church members by the old platform were "visible saints;" now they are regarded but as learners and disciples. In this transition, it is urged, the exclusiveness of the Church and its highest claim of authority and ministry have been lost, and it must be content to rank with the human societies, the great fraternities of the age, many of which outrank the church in ministries of practical benefit.

Two answers may be made to this form of criticism: (1) The Church is only returning to the simplicity of Christ and the practice of the Apostolic period, in estimating itself as a means to an end, and in looking upon its members not

as saints, but rather as students and workers pledged to follow the Master in a way that may be expected to broaden constantly in knowledge and service. "And he gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ; till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." [1] (2) No fraternity assumes any such place as the Church of Christ occupies, notwithstanding any supposed lessening of its claims and sanctions. There are numerous fraternal organizations blessing human society, dispensing light and knowledge, while they minister efficiently to the needs of the poor and distressed. Such organizations accomplish much in the way of fellowship and true service; but they attempt nothing in such lines of worthy effort to which the Church is not pledged, while the Church goes beyond them all in constituting a bond of communion not only as between man and his fellow-man, but as between men and God.

[1] Ephesians iv. 11, 12, 13.

The Church still presents itself as an institution provided to unite professed disciples with Christ the Lord; to pledge them to obedience to Him who calls for more of generous unselfish service in behalf of human needs and interests than is included in the demands of any of the fraternities. Members of the Christian Church are pledged to follow Him who said: "I am among you as He that serveth." [1] "The son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." [2] "I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done unto you." [3]

A want of fidelity on the part of its members is often urged against the Church. The organization is criticised because its members do not live up to their professions. Hypocrites and pretenders find place within its ranks, and therefore, say some, the institution itself should be discarded.

There is no logic in such a conclusion. As well might the rash iconoclast seek to destroy the family relation because there are inmates of a household not amenable to domestic ties and restraints, whose words and acts are out of harmony with the principles of kindred association and helpfulness. The Church is not a perfect

[1] Luke xxii. 27. [2] Matt. xx. 28. [3] John xiii. 15.

institution judged by the lives and characters of its members; its glory is dimmed and its usefulness impeded by those who are stumbling-blocks in the way. But all this does not touch its intrinsic character, or detract from its divinely appointed mission in representing Christ and His kingdom on the earth. The Church is manned by weak, imperfect men; but behind these agents is the Lord of life and light, whose blessed energy constitutes its assured permanence and growth into an ideal state. "For Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but holy and without blemish." [1]

But why fix attention too strongly upon excrescences and defects? The Christian Church has an illumined history in which are shown saintly characters and heroic deeds. It is true that even among the Apostles there was a Judas; and in the Church as first established there were men like Ananias and Simon the sorcerer of Samaria. Selfish and base men have been num-

[1] Eph. v. 25–27.

bered among the professed disciples of Christ in every age; but the great majority of church members have been honest, kind-hearted, God-fearing men and women, who have worthily represented the faith they have professed, and helped to advance the Master's kingdom on earth. True faith and true piety have never been extinct in the Christian Church. So the word of God has been proclaimed, public worship maintained, holy rites observed, and an abundant service of good rendered by this One Institution that represents the Divine Life incarnate in Christ. Even in our day, while the defective material of the Church in all its branches is clearly visible and its short-comings so numerous, where else do we look to find the most attractive expressions of human character, the most of devotion to high and noble aims, the most of hearty effective service in the ways of related interest and public good?

In other forms of objection more stress of adverse opinion is laid upon special features in church government and usages. Let the Church abide, say some of its critics, but put away its ecclesiasticism, its rigidity of forms and cere-

monies. And so comes the suggestion of discountenancing the use of the ordinances, on the ground that they are of no practical benefit and do not comport with the spirit of the age. Especially does this feeling manifest itself in regard to the Lord's Supper. That is a relic of superstition, we are told. It is identified with the debasing doctrines of a corrupted church, and even as observed in Protestant communions, those of most catholic and liberal tendencies, there are remnants of errors and vain traditions associated with its use. It is of little or no practical value; indeed sometimes it stands as a hindrance to church growth, for very likely some would enter into relations with that organization were it not that they dislike to take part in the observance of this ordinance.

Such expressions of adverse judgment frequently heard will have but slight effect on the minds of those who regard the language of Jesus in instituting this rite as a command for its perpetuation. "Do this in remembrance of me," [1] comes to them as a sufficient warrant for its continual observance. Even without any express command of the Scriptures requiring the

[1] 1 Cor. xi. 24.

general and continued use of this rite, we find a good reason for its acceptance and perpetuation in the fact that the Apostles transmitted it to those who succeeded them in the administration of church affairs, and thus it was passed on and has claimed recognition through all the Christian centuries. Surely we should not think of lightly discarding a rite used and honored for well nigh two thousand years.

Its utility and its attractiveness are questioned; but so indeed is Christianity opposed, and on much the same ground. To some people all the services of religion are distasteful, while to others the joy of praise and worship is exceedingly great. It counts as nothing against the Lord's Supper that certain minds shrink from it, and others see little beauty or significance in the use of the bread and the cup at the celebration of the communion. Ask the great company of communicants and they will testify to the holy and sweet influences that have come to them in the observance of this ordinance. They have been quickened religiously by partaking of the elements. They have felt a drawing away from sin and toward righteousness as they have united in a service intended and adapted to bring them

spiritually near to Christ. By repeating the act frequently, as opportunity has been offered, they have been strengthened in their purposes of holy and helpful living.

There can be no doubt of the preponderance of Christian testimony in favor of this rite. If it were needed in the first age as a remembrance of Jesus Christ, to bring His life and teachings to the minds of the Apostles and early disciples, to signify all so forcibly the redemptive agencies of Divine grace, and to prompt and express a renewal of consecration to Him, surely it is still needed for the same purposes. Human nature has not changed, man's spiritual needs and interests are much the same; and the earnest aspiring disciple will still find fresh inspiration and a new and larger measure of strength as he tastes of the "cup of consolation," and partakes of the food of the Holy Communion. Thus will the perfect exemplar, the Great Head of the Church and the Saviour of the world, be brought visibly near, and the ear of the believing, trustful soul will be open to hear the grand proclamation respecting the blessed consummations of Christ's redeeming work: "Wherefore also God highly exalted Him, and gave unto him the name

which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."[1]

VIII. — Privileges of Church Membership.

It will not be doubted that the expression of Christian faith and purpose helps to spiritual development. When any path is declared it seems to become more clear and important to the individual making the avowal. It is when we have openly espoused a noble cause, when we have positively committed ourselves to a meritorious enterprise, that there comes to us a stronger sense of the worth of that to which we have bound ourselves; and in such increase of appreciation there is not a little of satisfaction to the moral nature. We find much of the zest of life, along the upward ranges, in an open identification with and a pronounced advocacy of great and important interests.

It was a matter of rejoicing with Saint Paul

[1] Phil. ii. 9–11.

that he had taken his place with the followers of the Crucified One. How fervently the Apostle expresses his earnest conviction: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek."[1] He had a feeling of exultation that he stood with believers and workers, and was not merely a silent and passive adherent of the Master's cause. He gratefully acknowledged that he was a recipient of the "unsearchable riches of Christ," esteeming it a blessed privilege to make such an avowal and be counted among the members of the primitive Church. To declare himself in this way of open profession, to signify outwardly his faith, and pledge himself to Christian living and service, was regarded as a privilege, not a hardship. The same experience has been repeated in devout hearts all down the centuries. One cannot stand as the highest type of a Christian, and make no sign; most assuredly he cannot understand the grand possibilities of Christian experience until he has given expression to the beliefs entertained and the purposes which have been formed.

[1] Romans i. 16.

And then follows the privilege of becoming a witness for Christ. Jesus assured His disciples that they should have an opportunity to testify of him. Was it not an honor and a privilege that they were thus commissioned to represent their great leader and declare his truth? The way and manner in which Jesus gave the announcement admits of no other view. "It is expedient for you that I go away; but when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me; and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning." [1]

At the time when these words were spoken the disciples had but a dim perception of their import; they failed to realize that it would ever appear to them much of a blessing or privilege to bear witness. But after Pentecost what was there in their experience that gave them more of moral exaltation and satisfaction than the fulfilling of this commission? Gladly did they testify of the Crucified and Risen Saviour; and in the giving of their testimony to His divine character and saving grace there came to their hearts a fulness of joy.

[1] John xv. 26, 27.

Something of the same privilege is accorded believers who confess Christ now, and devote themselves to the work of advancing His kingdom on the earth. They become witnesses of Christ in a very real and important sense. They testify to the truth and the power of Christianity in various ways, and by so doing are quickened and blessed spiritually. It is by such true witness-bearing that they become associated with the glorious company of prophets, apostles, confessors, martyrs, who represent the most heroic and saintly types of character. Is it not a joy and inspiration to realize this bond of connection with noble souls, — to take even the humblest place among faithful witnesses of Christ?

It is a privilege, also, for which the Church prepares the way, that Christian believers and workers may have fellowship one with another here on the earth. Very precious is the communion of those of kindred faith and aims; and if the Church of Christ had no other claim to respect than as thus providing a ministry of pleasant and grateful association, it would still have value. The communion of the early Church was more intense than now. Its members were

more closely united, hand clasping hand, and heart beating with heart in a strong and beautiful sympathy, so that brethren realized the utmost of a sweet and powerful fellowship. They had all things in common; they stood by each other in good and in evil report; they prayed together and rejoiced in the faith they had received, to which they were solemnly committed, and for the extension of which they labored with zeal and steadfastness. There is not so much of unity in the modern Church; there is not so much of the fraternal feeling as ought to exist; but with all that is lacking there is yet enough of fellowship among church members to show the cementing, cohesive, vivifying nature of Christian faith, and to make evident the spiritual satisfaction of believers thus associated together.

The local Church represents a Christian household — a fraternal, family relation — in which one may count it a privilege to have place. We share in common much that is best and holiest in our lives, and it is only as we walk in obedience to the law of rightful association that we attain highest good or best satisfy ourselves. Well, therefore, may we prize all instrumen-

talities that tend to bring men nearer to each other, impelling them to join hands in true fellowship and helpfulness. The Church does afford this bond of connection; its members are privileged to share a delightful communion, as they walk and worship together, animated by the gracious spirit of him who said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."[1] In the Church, and through the Church, there ought to be realized far more of holy and helpful fellowship than is possible in any fraternity or merely human society however meritorious; and there should be an appreciation of the worth of this superior kind of fellowship.

There are likewise direct and practical ministries flowing out from the Church, concerning which we should not close our eyes. Men and women who take their places within the lines of a church, being moved to stand there by reason of deep convictions and hearty faith, may expect to find in the relation thus entered into, many helps of Christian culture and grace. They may expect to be helped along the pilgrim path of earth, by the strong hands of those who walk

[1] John xiii. 35.

by their side; to be restrained, perhaps, from wrong-doing sometimes, as well as encouraged "to walk worthily of the calling wherewith they are called,"[1] by numerous strong influences which the Church commands and brings into use. Especially may the members of a Church expect to profit spiritually by exercises in which they are called to take part, and particularly by engaging in the Holy Communion, — a service which they will be far more likely to recognize when they have publicly confessed Christ and united with the Church, than when they stand among outsiders. And surely it will be esteemed a gracious help to the weary and stumbling spirit, that so frequently one may sit at the table of the Lord and partake of the bread which symbolizes the Bread of Life, thus being refreshed and strengthened in the moral powers and determinations; that one may taste of the emblematic cup and remember the Saviour who bowed himself down on the cross of Calvary and suffered for us all. The Communion Service, with all that properly goes with it of spiritual incitement and blessing, deserves to rank among

[1] Eph. iv. 1.

the privileges for which the Church prepares the way and gives an earnest call.

Along these and other lines of helpfulness the ministries of the Church are exercised upon its own members. Those who stand within its lines are greatly privileged and blessed. As members of a spiritual household they walk, and work, and worship together, being drawn nearer to each other and to Christ by the position they have taken, the relations they have assumed, and the work in which they engage in His name. Are not these advantages real and important? Does not the Church minister thus to fulness of life religiously? Is it not a glorious instrumentality of privilege and blessing to its own members, as well as a potent agency of good to the world at large? Ought it not to stand on a higher plane in the minds of its own members? Should not its privileges be better appreciated? Should not an ardent affection impel the utmost of devotion to an agency thus fruitful of blessing? Would that each soul enrolled under the banner of the Cross might be charged with the holy impulse expressed in Dr. Dwight's suggestive lines: —

"I love thy church, O God!
Her walls before thee stand,
Dear as the apple of thine eye,
And graven on thy hand.

"For her my tears shall fall;
For her my prayers ascend;
To her my cares and toils be given,
Till toils and cares shall end.

"Beyond my highest joy
I prize her heavenly ways,
Her sweet communion, solemn vows,
Her hymns of love and praise."

IX. — Obligations of Church Members.

The obligation of holy and helpful living rests upon men, whatever position they take or refuse to take as related to the discharge of moral service. One is not released from accountability to the law of God because he declines to admit such accountability, or places himself in an attitude unfavorable to the performance of duty. Whether within or without the Church, whether they consent to moral obligations or refuse to allow their claims, men cannot be set free from the demands and judgments of God's rule; wherever they are standing they are bound "to live soberly, righteously,

and godly in this present world,"[1] and must expect to be held to account for coming short of the full measure of personal duty.

But some obligations assume distinctness when we have placed ourselves in a favorable attitude toward them. Certain duties will appear clear and urgent to those who enter into Church relations and take upon themselves the covenant pledges of prayer and service. They will feel that henceforth they are to be watchful and active regarding religious interests, both as these relate to their own good and the good of others. They will not think to enter the Church for rest and ease, supposing the end to be reached when they have made a public confession of their faith, and that henceforth they can sit with folded arms and enjoy their religion. Rather will a fresh ardor incite them as a wider scope of duty presents itself. They will see how, in the new relation entered upon, some special obligations have been assumed, while they have pledged themselves to the full service of Christian discipleship.

1. Among specific duties which ought to appear more urgent and attractive is attendance

[1] Titus ii. 12.

upon public worship. So far as possible, professed Christians should attend upon all the services of the sanctuary. This is important now, even as when the Apostle gave the rule to the early Church. "Let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together." [1] "Be ye filled with the spirit; speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your hearts unto the Lord." [2] Members of the Church are specially looked to for the support of public worship, the maintenance of social religious meetings, and the carrying forward of other ministries of Christian culture; and to none of these duties ought they to be indifferent. Men and women whose names are borne on Church books, but who, having no good excuse, are infrequent attendants upon the services of the sanctuary, meetings of prayer and conference, the stated meetings of the Church, and the Lord's Supper, are grievous stumbling-blocks in the way of church prosperity.

2. Church membership carries with it a special regard for the truths of Christianity as represented by the organization in which one

[1] Hebrews x. 25. [2] Eph. v. 19.

has found a religious home. There is an understood loyalty to the faith and principles of one's own Church. Without narrowness and bigotry, there should yet be manifested a strong devotion to the great principles of Christianity as interpreted by that branch of the Church with which a believer is connected. He should have a holy enthusiasm for his faith and his Church. He should be exceedingly sensitive as regards everything that pertains to Church interests, grieving when adverse conditions arise, and rejoicing when prosperity attends her way. With whatever Church connected, there should be no hesitancy in an avowal of the great doctrines made distinctive in the teaching of that communion, no backwardness in supporting the Church that proclaims his view of the essentials of Christian faith, and no remissness of duty in giving and doing for the dissemination of the truth as it has been received and professed. "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit ye like men, be strong."[1]

3. The Church of our time must undertake a work of wide and varied scope. It must justify its existence by a productive usefulness,

[1] 1 Cor. xvi. 13.

not only in the minds and hearts of its own members, but in the world at large. For this work, to this end, members of the Church need to be on the alert, thoroughly impressed with an idea of their individual responsibility, as well as of the functions of the organization into which they have entered. To maintain public worship and see that the Christian ordinances are not neglected constitutes one part of the obligation of Church members. To care for the Sunday School; to show an active interest in auxiliary societies of the Church, both within the local body and outside; and to be helpful in denominational movements and enterprises, are also to be included among obligations that should be deeply impressed upon those who have affirmed the Christian faith and purposes. And still more must be attempted and done in the way of education, benevolence, reform, and social uplifting by a live Church. The Called Out people of God cannot be indifferent to the world's great needs. They are associated together in the name of Him who went about doing good, who heeded every appeal for mercy and help, and who left for His followers the significant message, "Inasmuch as ye have

done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."[1] Being thus enrolled and pledged, it becomes them to live as their Master lived, to follow Him practically in works of benevolence and love, and to make the Church — the body of Christ — conspicuous as the most pronounced and effective agency of blessing in the world. It has the right of way to this first place. It is the most comprehensive institution ever organized, and has the possibilities of largest accomplishment. If faithful to itself, and if faithful to the grand principles of the Gospel, the Church will be most potent in all that concerns the interests of related life, in all that pertains to the great world's moral advancement and purification.

It depends upon the members of the Church individually, under the divine leading and blessing, as to this productiveness. What can I do in such a work? ought to be the question of each member. If no great service can be rendered or large gift made, something surely can be offered, if only there is the right spirit. How clearly Saint Paul states the rule and makes the

[1] Matt. xxv. 40.

application: "Having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of our faith; or ministry, let us give ourselves to our ministry; or he that teacheth, to his teaching; or he that exhorteth, to his exhorting: he that giveth, let him do it with liberality; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without hypocrisy."[1]

If the members of any branch of the Christian Church will but keep this standard of duty before them and act accordingly, great and blessed results will be sure to follow their combined activities. Apathy, indifference, dull and dreary formalism, will be swept away before the strong current of united efforts, and the Church will succeed outwardly and spiritually because it deserves success; because its members are standing and working together as true disciples of their risen Lord, each rendering a full measure of service according to what is the personal ability and opportunity. These are the disciples unto each of whom the blessed words of the Master shall one day be addressed: "Well done,

[1] Romans xii. 6–9.

good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."[1]

X. — What is your Duty?

The Christian Church exists to-day under various distinctive names, and all the different communions claim to be branches of the true vine. It does not belong to the province of this Manual to discuss the rightfulness of such a claim in any case where the question may be raised. The essential Church exists in many forms, affirming ideas and doctrines by no means the same, and observing practices quite unlike, but still pervaded by sufficient of the Christ truth and spirit to give it vitality. Even in the first age this separateness was indicated. "And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord."[2]

Assuming that this Church exists, questions like these present themselves to every thoughtful person religiously inclined: "What is my duty? Ought I to unite with such an organiza-

[1] Matt. xxv. 21. [2] 1 Cor. xii. 5.

tion? Is it required of me that I should signify my faith publicly and take the pledges of membership in the Church?" These are important questions; how shall they be answered?

In this word of friendly appeal, earnest and urgent as the writer desires it should be, there are yet two or three things to be stated in the way of a fair presentation of the claims of Church membership.

It may be said at the outset that salvation does not hinge upon entering the visible Church and conforming to certain prescribed rites. The soul's destiny does not depend upon membership in any organization.

It should also be understood that it is possible for a person to live an upright, useful life, without confessing Christ publicly or uniting with any communion of believers. Many saintly souls have not seen their way clear to join any body of Christians, and yet the remembrance of the virtues of these non-church members is very precious. Excellent people may be found in every parish and community, who render much help to Christian institutions and enterprises, but who decline for one reason or another to commit themselves to Christ by an outward profession.

But allowing, and even emphasizing, these two facts; and putting with them that other fact of the imperfectness of the Church, there yet seem to be plenty of arguments in favor of uniting with the Church, provided one has some belief in Christ and a sincere purpose to live a Christian life.

It is an express command of our Lord that believers should acknowledge him and take an open, well-defined position of discipleship. There is a solemn requirement of duty. This is not only specifically stated in the Scriptures, but is likewise a matter of fair inference. If corrupt men unite in the interests of unbelief and wickedness, how shall they be successfully opposed except by the united efforts of believers? How shall the truth be sustained and the Kingdom of Christ advanced on the earth, unless organized movements are put forward to this end? If there is need of the Church to oppose wickedness, to uphold and disseminate Christianity, that Church may of right appeal to all who believe in the truth which it represents and the ends it seeks to promote, to come into its communion. Is it not your duty, O reader, to stand squarely on the Lord's side? And if you are disposed to

thus place yourself, where else can you go to signify your allegiance and purpose but into the Christian Church? Your responsibility is evident. Your duty is plain.

Does not the appeal urged on the ground of affection touch your heart? Saint Paul said, "The love of Christ constraineth us."[1] If we apprehend the Christ love as signified to us by the whole tenor of His life and by His death on Calvary, it would seem that no great amount of urging would be required to move us to enter the one organization that best represents the truth and love of Christ. Grateful affection toward Him who loved so much and so steadfastly will surely add strength to the call that is made for acknowledgment and service. Is not this influence sufficiently potent to draw many hearts from a position of undue timidity in the expression of their religious convictions, and lead them to take the one step which will signify in the clearest manner their belief in and love for the Saviour of the world?

Others of earnest thought and devout feeling will be appealed to by the motive of increased usefulness. Said a young man to the writer, not

[1] 2 Cor. v. 14.

long ago, "I wish to unite with the Church that I may do more for interests that seem to me important, — that I may do more to help deliver the souls of my fellow-men from error and sin." What higher motive can be presented to a noble soul? By the mighty logic of increased usefulness is this appeal for church membership urged upon earnest and devout hearts. Standing in the Church, working with the Church, one can certainly increase his influence in the way of Christian service. By such identification and co-operation he will certainly augment the efficiency of his religious activities in various lines of duty. To do good, to be more extensively useful, should have weight as a proper motive in deciding the question of church membership. If abstractly the duty does not seem quite clear, if the call does not seem just now of special urgency, when regard is given only to personal needs, may not this thought of an increased usefulness turn the scale in the right direction?

The Church needs a reinforcement of men and women with whom this shall be a governing motive. It has a place and a hearty welcome for those who desire not only to grow in grace themselves by use of its appointed ministries,

and to edify one another, but to render a practical service through a living Church in disseminating truth, lifting the heavy burdens that press upon individuals and society, and turning many souls to righteousness. Influenced by such a noble purpose, will not some brave, true hearts find their way into the Christian Church, there to be "living epistles of Christ," [1] examples of purity, love, and faith, and zealous workers for truth and humanity?

"What is your duty?" There can be no doubt as to the command of Jesus for an expression of faith and a pledge of service. There can be no question of the apostolic sanction of the Church institution, and of the early practice of receiving believers into such an organization on profession of faith in Christ as the Son of God. Concerning the use of the two ordinances there is abundant proof of the importance attached thereto by the Christians of the first period. Nor is there any question that the Church has existed through all the centuries, a means of comfort and edification to countless souls, an instrumentality of benign service in the world, despite all its corruptions and im-

[1] 2 Cor. iii. 3.

perfections, and that it presents itself now claiming the pledged support of Christian men and women.

Some of the objections urged against the Church have been considered heretofore. They are numerous; but they do not stand before an honest, prayerful testing. The feeling of personal unworthiness is, without doubt, a consideration that prevents great numbers of devout souls from accepting church membership. Often this feeling is allowed too much influence in deciding the question under review. Some persons wait too long to qualify themselves for church membership. They think to settle all questions of doctrine and become morally and religiously perfect, — and then, perhaps, unite with a church. Years will come and go, and most likely they will still be on the outside. The appeal here urged is for no action of undue haste, — for no lessening of the importance of church vows and ordinances; but when there is some faith in Christ and love for Him, and a fixed purpose to lead a Christian life, there is no call or justification for delay because so many questions of religion are yet unsettled, and saintly character is not yet acquired.

It is the Church of Christ that invites believers to its communion, to many and great privileges, to labors under its sanctions and by its aids. Entering the door of the Church with pure motives, complying with a duty made clear to the heart and the understanding, there will never be any regret because of the important step taken; on the contrary, augmented joy and peace, as Christian experience broadens and deepens, as more of opportunity is given for service, and a glowing faith makes clear the blessed realization of Saint John's vision set forth in the Apocalypse: "And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever."[1]

XI. — Personal Influence and Service.

From one point of view the Church presents itself as an aggregation of individual forces. It takes on an institutional form and character

[1] Rev. v. 13.

according to what is the spiritual productiveness of the men and women in its communion. The persons who compose its membership are factors which help to determine its range of influence and the amount of its usefulness. Thus is it that the Church as a whole is set forward or held back, and thus any branch of the Church is affected in matters that relate to its progress and efficiency.

We shall be likely to find prosperity in any Church whose membership includes men and women who realize their moral responsibility and act accordingly. Where there is a good degree of Christian faith and devotion possessing the minds of individuals in the Church, there we shall look for an active, productive church life. First of all, the members themselves must develop spiritual-mindedness, which so naturally leads to and results in a true prosperity. This fact gives significance to the prayer of the Apostle for his friend Gaius: "Beloved, I pray that in all things thou mayest prosper and be in health, *even as thy soul prospereth.*"[1] When the individual members of the organization have attained this desired condition,

[1] 2 John, 2.

the Church itself will be sure of a genuine prosperity. It will be extensively useful as an instrumentality that represents the combined faith and energy of many consecrated hearts.

The Church must have this personal influence and service to accomplish its largest and best work. The institution cannot act as a piece of machinery; it is the men and women who stand within its lines that shape its activities and fix the rank of its honor and usefulness. Personality in the Church deserves recognition; the individual thought and will must not be too much repressed, and each faithful worker must be given a place and opportunity of service. This personal activity counts for much; it should neither be ignored nor underestimated.

John Henry Newman, whose personality was of so intense a character, once said: "My only business is to find out what I am and put it to use." So he sought to make his life active and productive; and that he succeeded in this to a very considerable degree will not be questioned. "I am not master of myself," said Martin Luther, "God hurries and drives me to my work." When an individual is controlled by such a feeling, when he hears and heeds

the call that comes to him to be of service to an institution, a cause, a principle, and thus to help mankind, he is taken out of weakness and made a potent influence in the world. Then there is readiness for duty, and then the service of Christ is engaged in willingly, cheerfully, even according to the spirit of devotion that prompted the prophet's response to the call that came to him: "I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me."[1]

It is personal effort that is required in behalf of the great interests of related life, — to bring souls out of error and sin, to advance the Master's kingdom among men. If we could only have the earnest, strong promptings to such a service, filling and ruling the hearts of individual men and women who have already taken their places within church lines, how much might be accomplished! What the Church needs to-day is not money, or new methods, or improved ecclesiastical machinery, so much as living souls acting under a sense of personal accountability and always ready to do God's bidding. With such obedient activity on the part

[1] Isaiah vi. 8.

of those who have professed the name of Christ, what might not be accomplished in and through His Church! How it would augment the force of church life and productiveness if each believer was impressed by the feeling that he must put to use the one, two, or five talents which have been entrusted to him, being controlled by a holy enthusiasm to be a loving, loyal worker in His Name! Then indeed would the fruits of a whole-hearted discipleship appear in fulfilment of our Lord's statement: "I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without Me ye can do nothing." [1]

By this union with Christ comes growth and development of the religious nature, with a productiveness of the life such as the Master urged upon His disciples. Let there be this intense feeling animating the minds of individual believers; let them realize the Christ love and the Christ power, and who will doubt that a mighty revival would sweep over the Church, extending its usefulness an hundred-fold!

To rouse the individual and set him to work is the problem that confronts us. How may we

[1] John xv. 5.

hope to secure this activity and accomplishment? How may a little body of believers banded together in the name of Christ do more for the honor of the Crucified One? How may the Church at large show forth an applied Christianity that will most effectually bless and exalt the race? Many answers will be given to the questions proposed, as many ways can be pointed out for broadening and deepening the channels of individual influence in the Church and the world. One primary, essential, and most powerful help to such desired work and results, is the "Witness of the Spirit" in the hearts of men and women receptive to its influence. It is an endowment of power from above, a breathing of the Holy Spirit upon a human soul, that gives the utmost of obedient, glad service in the interests of truth and humanity, making every Christian thus wrought upon a potent force of good in the world.

Do we need to say what new courage and strength, what new power of accomplishment, are thus made available? How changed were Peter and James and John, and the other disciples, after the day of Pentecost! They received enlightenment and inspiration as the gift of the

Spirit. Henceforth they had a new assurance of the truth of the Gospel: they were instructed, uplifted, directed, ready to go forth and attempt the moral conquest of the world according to the great commission they had received. This was the word that had been spoken, the call that had been given: "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."[1] But they had been told to wait for the dispensation of the Spirit that came to them at Pentecost; and while they waited and prayed, being "all with one accord in one place,"[2] the promise was fulfilled, and they entered upon the work of establishing and diffusing Christianity, rendering glorious service and showing the "fruit of the Spirit" in their words and their accomplishments.

The early Christians acted under the same Divine influence. They realized that "the hand of the Lord" was upon them, that the Divine Spirit had been given to them. Thus does Saint

[1] Matt. xxviii. 19–20. [2] Acts ii. 1.

Paul affirm the fact: "For our gospel came unto you not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance."[1] So it was the Apostolic Church flourished, and wonderful results attended the preaching of the word. Not upon the Apostles only, but upon those who believed and worshipped and prayed with them, came there the endowment of power from on high. Christians in the early days were full of power, being full of the Holy Ghost. And the church was a victorious church having such an equipment, such a membership.

The Holy Spirit is still to be recognized and depended upon as the source of power among believers and in the Church. It is manifest to some extent in the hearts of faithful men and women, and in the devoted labors of those who follow most nearly to Christ the Lord. It is seen in the Christian operations at home, and in missionary undertakings abroad, which reflect so much of glory upon the Church of Christ. But believers have not that Spirit in its fulness, and therefore the Church is less useful than it ought to be; and the human world is not ministered to and blessed as might be the case if there was

[1] 1 Thess. i. 5.

a more earnest, confident looking for the presence and help of the Holy Ghost. The dispensation of the Spirit has not been abrogated; the gift is still waiting to be bestowed on earnest, prayerful souls. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?"[1] Oh that they who read these words, yea, the whole membership of the Church Universal, might feel and say, —

"Our wills are ours, we know not how:
Our wills are ours to make them Thine."

With this "witness of the Spirit" there would be less of apathy and indifference in the churches, less of faint-heartedness in the hearts of believers; for, being roused and quickened, they would hear and heed the call of duty; they would feel and know that to help men now, to be of real service to others, is at once the true business, the satisfying joy, the abiding glory of living.

"Ask God to give thee skill in comfort's art
That thou may'st consecrated be,
And set apart unto a life of sympathy;
For heavy is the weight of ill in every heart,

[1] Luke xi. 13.

> And comforters are needed much
> Of Christlike touch."

It is personal consecration that most is needed within the lines of the Christian Church. There is a personal service demanded which may be hard and painful sometimes; self-surrender and self-denial that may challenge a disciple's faith; but if there is a brave persistence in the way of duty, a faithful conforming of the life to the law and love of Christ, power will be given both to do and to endure. And they who walk thus with Christ, seeking to imitate Him in a ministry of light and help to those in need, shall find the true zest of existence, — shall learn the blessed truth, —

> "That the sum of a life's true living
> Is not what our souls receive,
> But the gain that is found in giving,
> I steadfastly believe."

And doubtless a special joy will fill the minds of faithful workers who, by their personal influence and efforts, shall render an efficient service in bringing their brothers and sisters to Christ, and to the one organization that best represents Him, thus helping to extend the Master's kingdom spiritually and as an institution. To them

the ancient promise has a beautiful significance: "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament: and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars in heaven for ever and ever."[1]

[1] Daniel xii. 3.

THE END.

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